

GERHARDT  
Materialen zur Blinden-psych

The sight <sup>CON</sup>ception of  
those Born Blind, by  
Alexander Reuss

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Those who in ordinary life hear about a blind person, understand under this heading, a person whose ability to see is absolutely nil, and often, too, a person who fails in having any conception of sight that can be conveyed through the means of conscious vision. The blind man as he finds himself in small or large groups in the institutions of the blind, or as he incorporates himself in his broadly branching associations has no more narrow conception of this problem than the seeing leader, or the physician of these institutions. These people also denote as blind anyone who is deprived of the full use of his sense of sight, because of the partly missing light of his eyes so that in many things he has to rely on the help and mediation of normally seeing people. The institutions for the blind harbor a number of people who possess light perception and who can partially recognize objects, can go to strange places unaccompanied and who are in a position to give much service to their totally blind brothers.

One sees how in this way the blind are separated into two groups: Those who are quite bereft of the light of their eyes, and Those who still have a conception of light, though it be a weak one. There are those who have a conception of color. The blind can be distinguished in another way. There are those who have been blind from birth, or from the conscious awakening of the sense of sight, while others have lost their sight through illness or accident. These latter give us to believe that they keep in their memory a conception of light and color. We have only to do with these non-seeing people

There was in the early days of the century a large body of

writers who were not only well known to the public but also

to the literary world. They were the writers of the

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who have never had any outside light impressions.

Those born blind are rare in the real sense of the word. Most of them have lost their vision through outside influences in the first days of their lives. But they have not consciously then received light and color impressions, because the conscious sight perception of the child actually sets in later. Therefore these do not stay in their memory. Now we are concerned in determining whether these "born" blind receive light and color impressions, and of what nature they are.

There are those (though rare) born blind whose blindness is an outcome of an embryonic stunting of the sight area of the brain. This stunting excludes some sort of the awakening and carrying out of sight conceptions. It is otherwise when the light of mediating workshift, optic nerve and eye is shut out somehow. Here is the brain in full possession of the faculty of seeing if there has been no derogatory influence imposed on it.

One has often stated that the blind have finer sensibilities than the seeing. These statements rest on a fallacy. The blind have the same sensibilities, just as sharp and just as expansive, with the exception of those that are facial exponents. But the lack of comfortable facial characteristics force him to deflect all impressions that are obtainable through the other senses. So he recognizes all objects, that the eye has become used to perceiving through inevitable tests, not merely as a surface but as bodies. The sense of hearing tells him the existence and direction of other objects. The senses are the same, but urgency and appropriate suitability work on these senses, so that they work more exactly and can be as richly used as possible. The brain works up all these impressions in the same way

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One has often stated that the blind have finer sensitivities than the seeing. These statements rest on a fallacy. The blind have the same sensitivities, just as sharp and just as expansive, with the exception of those that are tactile elements. But the lack of comfortable tactile characteristics forces him to deflect all impressions that are operable through the other senses. So he recognizes all objects, that the eye has become used to perceiving through inevitable tests, not merely as a surface but as bodies. The sense of hearing tells him the existence and direction of other objects. The senses are the same, but urgency and appropriate sensitivity work on these senses, so that they work more exactly and can be as reliably used as possible. The brain works up all these impressions in the same way



perhaps only a little less clearly aware as the brain of one whose senses are complete and in whom the overwhelming influence of the eye often blots out the impressions of other senses so much that they become unconscious rather than conscious. What sort of an attitude does he who is born blind take towards the actual when he lacks the coordination of impressions due to his incomplete sensory equipment.

I have known those born blind who in their spiritual maturity have perceived representations of nature in color and light and shade or have been able to read about them. They gloried in the delight of a description of sunset or sunrise. They became tender when they read of moonlight, and gay when they read of a sunny summer landscape. Yes in their impressions of gaiety or depression they perceived different colors, such as, gold, white, black, blue or red. That leaves us to conjecture that the brain of those born blind receives distinct impressions that could not have been got in a purely sensory way. It was not easy to conjecture what kind of impressions these were because the blind almost never could find words to describe them. They perceive something--some content to which they cannot give any particular form. Then I tried to find out if these blind people had any impression in front of their eyes, that told them of a certain lack there, that those who saw could not feel.

Those who become blind later, who have totally lost their eyesight have in front of their eyes and also at the place on the eye that used to be the focusing point of light and sense of sight, a distinct sense of darkness. To get used to this darkness is very difficult and not all those who become blind in later life do become used to it. The spirit of many becomes entirely

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broken and they become lost, if sickness and confusion do not bring worse calamities upon them. Some become used to the darkness and can go on living, accomodating themselves to other circumstances. I said "darkness",--"obscurity" or "blackness" would not be correct for it is not absolute blackness that confronts the sight of those who become blind in later life. It is only a darkness, that is often broken by sight reflexes of the nerves or the retina and that after complete destruction of both is not black but is a mixture of various colors of the spectrum in which we recognize yellow, blue, red, etc. but which however are not yellow, blue and red actually. It seems much more as if various colors of the sun have merged and darkened the eye.

It is not the same with those born blind. They have a different feeling in front of their eyes from that which they might feel on the rest of the body; e. g. the back of the hand; but these feelings are not unpleasant to them. They do not feel a lack of something that should be there. It is merely a certain sensibility of touch, which is particularly noticeable when the heavy air pressure of an object shows the blind persons that there is an object before him, that he can perceive without previously touching it. An influx of the brain particles of the sense of sight does not seem to carry out this feeling. Therefore, I have attempted in a roundabout way to come closer to an explanation of the lost activity of the sense of sight, the susceptibility of which accentuates the sense of touch and hearing.

On superficial observation, it might seem as if the conceptions of color and light as those born blind receive them through the medium of speech, only die out in the regions of touch and hearing so that the injured sense of

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On experimental observation, it might seem as if the conceptions of color and light as these born blind receive them through the medium of speech, only die out in the regions of touch and hearing so that the injured sense of



sight does not come into play at all. It seems therefore that the expressions used by those born blind and which illicit this appearance, are only fluent forms of substance for them which they could not express otherwise. The following is the result of careful observation:

It is very difficult to arrive at the conception of light held by him who is born blind. He feels light in his spiritual life as a something that is neither hearing, touch, taste or smell. A concealed activity of the sense of sight shows us that he holds it to be something not included in these sensations. The presentation of color is more exact. The experience of verbal speech has taught the blind persons that black and white are opposites. He has heard that fire is red, and the sky blue and these things influence his conceptions. The conception of black and white opposites is awakened in his sense of sight through naming of them and he invests these with the proper form of opposites, smooth and rough, cold and warm. Do not think however, that he thinks of white as cold, black as warm or visa versa. He has in his sense of sight only one conception like "smooth and rough" -- "cold and warm". Red is not hot for him but he has a strange sense impression on hearing the word "red" that is somewhat analagous to the "hot" in his touch conception.

It is the same with blue that is associated with the soft air outdoors, but these equivalent conceptions are not typical, one could draw quite different comparisons. The only fact that is typical is the appearance of conceptions in the dark sense of sight that in the other senses finds a more or less adequate expression. High and low could be just such conceptions as many others.





We can also be sure that the sense of sight in the brain of the blind born, does some work mysterious and still, and that this work, influences his own row of conceptions from the world of the seeing. The activity of the sense of sight is never more important than when the blind man takes cognizance of colors and circumstances through speech, hearing or sight and detracts from his other senses. And this hidden senseworks so uniformly and right in that it really is capable of discriminating between shadings of different colors. Yes, it is possible that the blind born may cherish and express an aesthetically correct picture of combinations of colors even though he has no realization of the veritable colors themselves, only feeling through them certain feelings in the activity of his sense of sight. Information shows that there are blind people who in clerical work and in narration give beautiful descriptions of things that they have never really seen.

Let us ask in closing what these activities of the brain can be based upon that enable a Helen Keller to form for herself a correct and beautiful conception of the world. The activity that is aquisitive enough to take to itself impressions from the outer world is an ability that the brain has been able to inherit from those forbears who could see. It is a transplanting of light and the possibility of influencing the children even when they are denied the medium of improvement that their seeing forbears, were capable of having. The reaso n for this work is not a valuation of these facts for the education and the building up of the blind. However, it does want to bring out the fact that the sense of sight of the blind does work and that through inheritance of its content it has reached the ability to form conceptions. The Article b y Berta Hirsch which is very significant concerning this subject will show that of course individual variations must appear.

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